

Ramona Grasslands Preserve – Public Access Plan Update

Public Workshop #2 – August 19, 2010 – Ramona Community Center Compilation of Comments and Questions from Audience Including Answers from County of San Diego Department of Parks and Recreation

General Comments & Questions Regarding Access in Ramona Grasslands Preserve

Question: What is the expected date of completion of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) process and adoption of the Resource Management Plan & CEQA?

Answer: The current deadline for completion of the Resource Management Plan and CEQA environmental document is December 2011. The deadline is tied to the type of environmental documentation is required (e.g. Mitigated Negative Declaration or Environmental Impact Report), so there is potential for an earlier completion date.

Question: What vehicular restrictions apply to interior trails? Shared use?

Answer: Motorized vehicles are prohibited within the Preserve except as may be necessary to accommodate persons with disabilities; to conduct ranger patrols and land management activities; and response to emergencies. Trails will be used for passive recreational uses including bird watching, hiking, horseback riding and bicycling.

Question: Will dogs be allowed?

Answer: The analyses conducted as part of the environmental review process pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for the Resource Management Plan (RMP) will determine what types of uses, such as leashed dogs, and appropriate locations of these uses within the Preserve.

Comments & Questions: Preliminary Preferred Alternative in SW Preserve Area, Including Pathways along Roads

Question: County provisions for fencing of pathways (within road right-of-way) for high-speed roads, such as Highland Valley Road?

Answer: The County Trails Program and the implementing document, the Community Trails Master Plan does not specifically require fencing for trails or pathways. On a case by case basis, fencing may be required for environmental purposes or adjacent to steep slopes. However, the adopted Ramona Community Trails and Pathways Plan has a Community Specific Policy (SP 1) which states: *New pathways are to have fencing or barriers between the traveled portion of the road and the pathway in cases where parkway widths are 15 feet or greater.* If there is sufficient available road right-of-way for Highland Valley Road and Rangeland Road, the Ramona Community Trails and Pathways Plan would require fencing assuming funding is available. The fencing requirement would also need to have concurrence from the County of San Diego Department of Public Works.

Question: Fencing: replace barbed wire fence?

Answer: Fencing replacement may be considered in the future after the completion of the environmental analyses associated with the Resource Management Plan.

Question: Width of pathways along roads?

Answer: The tread width of the pathways will be 10-12 feet. There may be width constraints in some areas due to existing utilities.

Question: Size of Oak Country II staging area to accommodate trailers?

Answer: The Oak Country II staging area is one acre in size and there will be parking space for four horse trailers and ten cars (with overflow room).

Question: Will 4-ft tread be only one-way for equestrian use?

Answer: The newly constructed trail on the western portion of the “loop” will have a four foot tread. DPR does not normally require or regulate “one-way” only use rules.

Question: Equestrians and bicyclists more interested in connectivity.

Answer: Connectivity was a major consideration during development of the preliminary preferred alternative trail concept. The preliminary proposed alternative provides trail/pathway connectivity between the southwestern, southwestern, and northeastern areas of the Preserve.

Comments & Questions: Preliminary Preferred Alternative in NW Preserve Area

Question: When would a “dry crossing” across Santa Maria Creek be usable?

Answer: The “dry crossing” at Santa Maria Creek will be usable most of the year, except during and after large rain or flood events.

Question: What are constraints to utilizing Old Survey Road 97?

Answer: Constraints to utilizing Old Survey Road 97 as a trail include potential impacts to raptor foraging and nesting habitat. The analyses conducted as part of the environmental review process pursuant to CEQA for the Resource Management Plan will determine if potential impacts can be reduced to less than significant through appropriate mitigation measures.

Question: Is Old Survey Road 97 an existing road easement/dedication?

Answer: Old Survey Road 97 is not an existing road easement or dedication. The road is currently being considered for listing as an historic route. The Ramona Trails Association has commissioned the preparation of documentation to present to the San Diego Historical Site Board to nominate Old Survey 97 for recognition as an historical site. The assessment will determine whether Old Survey 97 is eligible for listing on the

National Register of Historic Places, the California Register of Historic Resources and the San Diego County Local Register of Historic Places.

Question: Has County accessed latest research on impacts/disturbance of recreational use on raptors?

Answer: DPR has access to the latest research on impacts/disturbance of recreational use on raptors. This research will be reviewed and utilized to further refine the preliminary preferred trail alternative for the Preserve.

Question: What is the latest Federal ruling regarding “disturbance” versus “take” of eagles—are their specific distances?

Answer: The Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (16 U.S.C. 668-668d; BGEPA) protects eagles from “take”, where take is defined as to pursue, shoot, shoot at, poison, wound, kill, capture, trap, collect, molest, disturb individuals, their nests and eggs. “Disturb” was defined in 2007 (72 FR 31132 as “to agitate or bother a bald or golden eagle to a degree that causes...injury to an eagle, reduced productivity, or nest abandonment...”

Based on USFWS (1999)¹ and Richardson and Miller (1997)² the recommended buffer from an occupied golden eagle nest site is 0.5 mile. Richardson and Miller base their recommendation on three data points that have a range of 0.1 to 1.0 mile. Additionally, flushing distance for golden eagles in response to disturbance by pedestrians is cited as .25 mile.

Question: MSCP (Multiple Species Conservation Program) drives opportunities and constraints—it places restrictions on what can and cannot be done.

Answer: Yes, the MSCP does place restrictions of what can and cannot be done within the Preserve in regards to Public Access. Portions of the Preserve are within the South County MSCP Subarea Plan (adopted by the Board of Supervisors, October 1997). The MSCP was developed using the Board of Supervisors’ deal/negotiation points as concurred to by the Wildlife Agencies. One of the guiding principles was to develop a Subarea Plan that provides for public use (hiking, horse trails, etc.) in appropriate locations within the MSCP Preserve. The North County MSCP also recognizes the importance of providing the public passive recreational opportunities within the Preserve while preserving the biological and cultural resources. The analyses conducted as part of the environmental review process pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for the Resource Management Plan (RMP) will determine the appropriate types and locations of passive recreational uses within the Preserve.

¹ US Fish and Wildlife Service. 1999. Utah Field Office Guidelines for Protection of Raptors from Human and Land Use Disturbances. Salt Lake City office, USFWS. Prepared by Laura Romin and James A. Muck. 45pp.

² Richardson and Miller. 1997. Recommendations for Protecting Raptors from Human Disturbance: a Review. Wildlife Society Bulletin 25(3):634-638.

Question: Have recreation use permits been considered as a management tool?

Answer: Although the County is not considering the use of permits as a management tool, seasonal closures of the trails within areas of the Preserve may be considered in the future, if appropriate.

Comments & Questions: Preliminary Preferred Alternative in NE Preserve Area

Question: Will new loop trail option be considered in the future?

Answer: The County is not considering an additional loop trail as part of the preliminary preferred alternative. It is unlikely a new loop trail option would be considered in the future due to known biological constraints.

Question: What are the biological constraints to additional trail development in this area?

Answer: The Wildlife Agencies and other stakeholders had commented that raptor foraging and perching habitat could potentially be impacted by trail use.

Question: Can loops be created without raptor impact?

Answer: The analyses conducted as part of the environmental review process pursuant to CEQA for the RMP will determine the appropriate types and locations of trails and other passive recreational uses within the Preserve.

Question: Will the trail end at the northern boundary?

Answer: Yes, the trail currently ends at the northern boundary.

Question: Location for staging area?

Answer: A staging area is proposed in the northeastern portion of the Preserve.

Question: Trails closed to motor vehicle use?

Answer: Motorized vehicles are prohibited within the Preserve except as may be necessary to accommodate persons with disabilities; to conduct ranger patrols and land management activities; and respond to emergencies. Trails will be used for passive recreational uses including bird watching, hiking, horseback riding and bicycling.

Question: Connection to Montecito trails?

Answer: The trails in the northeastern portion of the Preserve will connect with the Montecito Ranch Development planned trails.

Question: Will some existing ranch roads be reduced in tread width for trail use?

Answer: The proposed east-west trail within the northeastern area of the Preserve shall be kept at its existing tread width. The north-south trail will be maintained at a reduced four-foot trail width.

Question: Rancher has recently cut new road.

Answer: The recently cut ranch road is most likely located on the Ramona Municipal Water District property. The cattle ranchers also have a grazing lease with the Water District. There are no new ranch roads cut on the Preserve.

Question: Connectivity and multi-use trail users may reduce impact, compared to ranch activity.

Answer: DPR acknowledges this statement.

Question: Ranch activity is less frequent than potential recreation use.

Answer: Trail use intensity is unknown within the Preserve. DPR will monitor trail use when the Oak Country II trail is open to the public in the Spring of 2011.

Question: Increasing availability of public use on public lands disperses the “load”—longer trails and more connections decrease congestion and potential impacts.

Answer: DPR acknowledges this comment.

Question: Disconnect between need for preservation and use—make more information available to promote understanding of different perspectives.

Answer: Information is available at www.sdparks.org including results of workshops and “Did you Know” flyers.

Question: Preserve users won’t be exclusive to Ramona—need to consider other issues, such as traffic, safety, signage, oversight, and protection.

Answer: The CEQA document for the RMP will consider these issues.

Comments & Questions: Preliminary Preferred Alternative in SE Preserve Area

Question: What is a vernal pool?

Answer: As defined by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, “Vernal pools are seasonal depressional wetlands that occur under the Mediterranean climate conditions of the West Coast. They are covered by shallow water for variable periods from winter to spring, but may be completely dry for most of the summer and fall. These wetlands range in size from small puddles to shallow lakes and are usually found in a gently sloping plain of grassland. Although generally isolated, they are sometimes connected to each other by small drainages known as vernal swales. Beneath vernal pools lies either bedrock or a hard clay layer in the soil that helps keep water in the pool.”

Question: Can NE and SE be connected, to enable return to staging area without doubling back?

Answer: The northeastern and southeastern portions of the Preserve can be connected via pathways within existing road right-of-way.

Question: What is the affiliation of the tribal representatives consulted?

Answer: The affiliations of the tribal representatives consulted by the County include: San Pasqual Band of Mission Indians, Santa Ysabel Band of Diegueno Indians, and Mesa Grande Band of Mission Indians.

Question: Where will the Cumming Ranch trails go?

Answer: The proposed Cumming Ranch Development trails travel from the development through the southeastern portion of the Preserve and then off-site to the town of Ramona.

Question: How will parking be controlled at trailheads—especially on Rangeland Road?

Answer: Issues such as traffic, safety and signage will be addressed in the CEQA document for the RMP.

Question: Include raptor viewing platform or site.

Answer: Inclusion of a raptor viewing platform or site along Rangeland Road will be taken into consideration in the Public Access Plan for the Preserve. The analyses conducted as part of the environmental review process pursuant CEQA for the RMP will determine the types and locations of appropriate passive recreational opportunities within the Preserve.

Question: In staging areas, delineate auto parking vs. equestrian equipment.

Answer: The staging area in Oak Country II (southwestern portion of the Preserve) will provide parking space for four horse trailers and ten cars with overflow room. These areas will be designated within the staging area.

Question: Lots of auto parking along Rangeland Road in winter.

Answer: Issues such as cumulative traffic impacts will be addressed in the CEQA document for the RMP.

Question: Would be good to reduce speed limit in the area.

Answer: Issues such as traffic safety and signage will be addressed in the CEQA document for the RMP.

Question: Airport doesn't seem to impact raptors.

Answer: Issues such as cumulative biological impacts will be addressed in the CEQA document for the Resource Management Plan.

Question: How do trailheads work without parking?

Answer: The proposed trailheads are essentially "access points" and the nomenclature used may be revised accordingly. The access points provide access from pathways in the road right-of-way to trails within the Preserve. These access points may include gates or 'step-overs' that will prevent vehicle access yet allow for hikers, bikers and equestrian users.

Question: Is the purchase and deed information available to the public?

Answer: DPR will consider posting these documents to the DPR website.